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ABSTRACT

A cross-country analysis based on 11 case studies on vocational education and training (VET) in Eastern and Central Europe was conducted. The countries are: Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovenia, and Albania. Data gathered included information about the following: political and economic background to the transformation of the education system; transforming the institutional structures in VET; restructuring the upper secondary level; VET at the upper secondary level; the role of enterprise-based training; legislation, responsibilities and funding for VET; curriculum, instruction, and assessment; teaching staff in VET; and educational research and information. The country studies showed that it is not possible to find any solutions, let alone "simple" ones, that would apply in general to the complex problems of VET in the countries in transition. There are no definite clear-cut models to be followed, nor can Western solutions be imposed. A policy of gradual change seems the only answer, but such an approach runs the risk of losing sight of the goals of reform and wasting energy on secondary issues. (Contains 28 references.) (KC)

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Vocational Education and Training Systems in Central and Eastern Europe

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1. Introduction

To achieve successful and effective cooperation with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEECs)in the field of Vocational Education and Training (VET), the western partner organisations require a solid information basis. On the one hand, this must provide reliable facts and assessments regarding the situation and development conditions in each of the countries. On the other hand, in the general context of the "region", it must include an overview of the main region-wide common reform trends and problems reflected and summarised in the term "transformation".

The following study provides a cross-country analysis commissioned by the ETF. It is based on eleven case-studies on VET in those countries included in EU-Phare assistance programmes. With one exception, these studies were compiled by "external" experts and are almost entirely based on material available in western languages. Despite the fact that the structural framework and analytical approach laid down by the coordinating institute, the CIBB in the Netherlands, was generally adhered to by the reports, the results reveal considerable discrepancies in their quality and range of information.

From a methodological point of view, this cross-country study is a secondary analysis mainly based on the material of these case studies and not a systematic comparative investigation employing its own research design and data. Against this background it attempts to highlight some of the most salient reform characteristics and problems as they have become evident in the wake of the transformation of the education systems. It also tries to point out some of the development trends and potentials which appear significant for international cooperation and to identify problems in need of further in-depth research. It goes without saying that an extremely complex area comprising issues which are common to all the countries concerned and others limited to specific countries, has to be reduced to a few basic perspectives. Moreover, as the term transformation indicates, every single education system is involved in a process of rapid change and these processes do not necessarily run parallel or according to the same pattern so that the individual systems are still in a state of flux with old and new structures and mentalities often coexisting or rather competing. In many ways, the attempts to find suitable solutions and priorities for development are still going on so that the stage of discussion on concepts and projects for reform must be carefully distinguished from the stage of implementing concrete reforms.

2. Political and economic background to system transformation in education

Vis-à-vis the fact that the CEECs are often indiscriminately referred to under the common label of former "socialist countries", it has to be pointed out that transition processes started from diverse constitutional and political positions:

- At the time of the collapse of socialist regimes in 1989, only four of them (Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Romania) were already wholly independent states and as such belonged to the "socialist community of states" dominated by the Soviet Union, i.e. to Comecon. The present day Czech and Slovak Republics belonged indirectly as constituents of the former federal state of Czechoslovakia.

- Three countries, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, belonged to the one-time Soviet Union, formally a federation, which was in actual fact a centrally governed one-party state with a centrally planned economy. The three Baltic states, which did not gain independence until 1991, likewise differ in a number of very basic features such as language, history, culture and religion.

- One of the CEECs, Slovenia, was part of yet another federal structure, Yugoslavia, which differed from the Soviet Union both ideologically and politically; it also only became an independent state in 1991.

- One more state, Albania, belonged to Comecon, but had not played an active role since the early 1960s and was thus the odd-man-out in the "socialist camp" when, following a period of seeking support from China, it pursued a policy of national self-sufficiency and internationally became largely isolated.

In this way the CEECs represented different strands of "socialism". Nonetheless, their social and economic fabric was shaped in a way which formed the basis for their common historical "legacy".

While some of the CEECs had some experience of economic reform prior to 1989 - especially Hungary, which had been preparing for the switch to a market economy since the early 1980s - others, such as Bulgaria, were at first hesitant to embark on a radical course of reform even after the demise of the old regime. Similarly, considerable differences can be registered in the paths followed by reform, as, for instance, in the priorities set in restructuring the economic system or in the attitudes and methods attached to privatising state-owned enterprises. None of the 11 reform states was able to escape a severe transformation crisis in its economic development - a massive slump in industrial production, high inflation rates, unemployment - which, depending on different conditions and reform models, has been overcome to varying degrees.

The biggest advances in dealing with the transformation recession have been made by the four CEFTA states (Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia), which now register a

positive growth rate again. The GDP shows signs of growth once more though the 1989 level of production has not been achieved by any of these countries again yet. This transition process was accompanied by an increasing degree of poverty among a considerable proportion of the population and, in the labour market, the improvement in industrial efficiency has been reflected in a rise in the unemployment figures. That the high social price to be paid for the transformation revealed by these problems has had its effects on the population is reflected in the voters' reactions in a number of countries where, in the latest elections, the more liberal and market oriented governments were replaced by parties which succeeded the one-time communist parties.

3. System transformation in VET: the institutional structures

3.1. Points of departure

Any attempt to describe the present education systems in the transition countries will only be a kind of fleeting snapshot showing an up-to-date segment of a long term reform process. Some of these processes had already got underway in the 1980s, others started up spontaneously after the collapse of the old regime while in other countries there was some delay. As a result, the individual countries have been occupied with their education reforms for differing periods of duration.

Despite the heterogenity of the political and cultural preconditions depicted above, the starting point and basis for the reform processes in the field of education were formed by the common structures and underlying organisational patterns, factors which themselves represented an historical amalgam of indigenous traditional features and the superimposition of Soviet socialist patterns. In the socialist states the common, fundamental principles of the education system comprised

- high degree of uniformity of schooling,
- a close link between education and the needs of the employment system and the planned utilization of labour resources,
- the ruling party's strict control over all aspects of the educational process.

The model of the socialist education system was constructed on a common foundation in the shape of a uniform "basic school" divided into two levels (primary and lower secondary). In the 1980s, practically the entire respective age cohorts achieved the transition to the upper secondary stage in the states studied. This stage was generally split up into three main types of general and vocational schooling preparing pupils partly for university admission and partly for entering employment.

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In view of the permanent shortage of skilled workers in the enterprises of the socialist states resulting from inefficient work organisation and the hoarding of manpower, one of the main tasks of upper secondary education was to direct the large majority of young people into the various paths of vocational training. The general secondary schools were also allotted the job of providing vocational or at least pre-vocational training while, conversely,in order to improve their standing, the vocational secondary schools were permitted to grant a certificate of general education qualifiying students in principle to apply for university admission alongside vocational qualifications. In Bulgaria and Slovenia a start had been made in the 1980s on integrating the upper secondary level establishments into one uniform type so as to stress the equal status of general and vocational schooling and to achieve improved coordination with economic planning. However, it soon proved impossible to implement these reforms and the schemes were dropped.

3.2. Restructuring the upper secondary level

Even though the CEECs reveal "a wide variety of transition styles" (Birzea), both on the level of the political and economic systems and in the education systems, the country reports make it possible to ascertain that in the field of education any abrupt break with the past has largely been avoided. The transition processes have been marked more by

- the adjustment of the systems "inherited" from the previous regimes to the new circumstances by way of modifiying and reforming individual elements in the system,
- innovations in the shape of the restoration of earlier, pre-communist features of the systems, such as the reintroduction and prolongation of the academic secondary schools or the revival of apprenticeship training,
- innovations achieved by introducing new structural forms, sometimes on the lines of western models, e.g. "dual" types of vocational training and new types of establishments in the post-secondary sector.

These general observations are confirmed when a closer examination is made of the development of institutional structures at the upper secondary level. On the whole, these have retained the above mentioned features although the functional interrelationship between general and vocational schools and within the vocational sector, together with their quantative relations have been somewhat altered. The duration of upper secondary education comprises 3-4 or 4-5 years depending on the country and type of school. As far as the Baltic countries are concerned,the basic school takes 9 years, in the other countries generally 8 years. In Slovakia and the Czech Republic the upper secondary stage is also preceded by a 9 year basic school; thus, the total length of schooling follows the general pattern of 8 + 4(5), 9 + 3(4) and 9 + 4(5).

The length of compulsory schooling, raised in a number of socialist countries to that of the upper secondary stage, has generally been reduced again and in most countries now corresponds with that of the basic school except in the case of Hungary where ten year compulsory schooling has been retained. On the whole, the basic school has kept its comprehensive character. In some countries pupils who have difficulty in coping with the academic curriculum are able to transfer to vocational training institutions before the end of compulsory education. On the other hand, academic secondary schools have likewise made inroads into the comprehensive principle: in the Czech and Slovak Republics, for instance, as well as in Hungary, the traditional academic schools (gymnasium) have been reestablished by extending them "downwards" and admitting pupils from the 5th class on the basis of selection procedures.

At the upper secondary level, the general secondary school (gymnasium or lyceum) has traditionally been accorded the function of preparing students for university entrance. In the wake of the systems transformation, the vocational training function ("polytechnical" education or even specific skill training), which used to characterize this type of school to a greater or lesser degree, has generally become less prominent or disappeared altogether. Differentiation of curricula for this type of school has now made it possible to form certain profiles and tracks (arts, maths, sciences) which are aimed particularly at encouraging higher academic achievements.

The leaving certificate, called matura in some countries after the Austrian tradition, represents a kind of gold standard for measuring performance in general education. It is an essential requirement for admission to higher education (institutions of higher education generally set their own entrance examinations as well) and serves as the yardstick for performance in other types of school at this level. In some countries it is possible for students completing general secondary schools, who do not aim at or are unsuccessful in gaining admission to higher education, to gain a vocational qualification in one or two year post secondary vocational institutions.

3.3. VET at the upper secondary level

Vocational education and training in the CEECs is predominantly school-based although there are various forms of enterprise-based VET and in some countries "dual" patterns are being revived or newly introduced. In most of the countries under review, initial training is mainly provided in two types of schools with separate historical traditions and separate functions:

a) the secondary technical schools provide qualifications for personnel at an intermediate level - "technicians" in the various branches of industry and agriculture, sub-academic staff in the health, social and cultural sphere, including pre-school and school teaching, and, more recently, management and business staff. With courses lasting 4 to 5 years, these schools mostly offer a vocational qualification along with a fully-fledged certificate of general education, thus giving graduates a choice between employment and higher education. Estonia and Lithuania have opted to transfer these

schools to the tertiary level, in the case of Lithuania reviving a type of higher vocational education already known in the 1920s and catering for graduates of both general and vocational schools.

b) Training provision in secondary vocational schools offers greater course choice and is directed towards awarding skilled worker qualifications ("blue collar" workers) in sometimes very narrowly specialized occupational profiles. Depending on the level of qualification, these may involve courses of one to two or three years' duration. A number of secondary vocational schools, or their equivalent in the various countries, are entitled to provide a certificate of general education in conjunction with a skilled worker's diploma so that a vocational school course may also lead to a "double" qualification. By opening access to higher education through the vocational school, it was intended to improve the latter's social status, but this expectation has been only partially fulfilled.

In various countries, a trend towards dropping the traditional dividing line between technical and vocational schools by creating a complex organizational unit with an enhanced range of choices can be observed as a significant step towards restructuring upper secondary education. Integrated types as, for instance, in Albania or the Czech Republic, provide a flexible course structure leading to a variety of qualifications within a broad occupational field.

Another path to integration has been embarked on by the Technical Lyceum in Poland, which comprises the vocational schools at the upper secondary level whilst focussing on general education complemented by a vocational component geared to a broad occupational field. Concrete vocational qualifications from various areas and levels - skilled worker, technician - are only awarded after completion of an additional course in a specialized post-secondary institution, which can last between a few months and two to three years. Arguments in favour of this type of training stress the new requirements and uncertain and unpredictable developments of the labour market. At the same time it offers an alternative to higher education studies as does the new type of advanced post-secondary VET (higher technical school), which is being introduced in both the CR and the SR and seems to be enjoying growing demand.

In the socialist states, both the demarcation line between the types of vocational schools and the quantative proportions allotted to the courses of upper secondary education were aligned to the requirements of the employment system. As a consequence of the transition to the market economy and the abandonment of direct state control of admission to the various secondary schools, massive changes in demand and supply and, thus, a shift in quantative proportions can be observed. Changing flows of young people at this level of schooling present a serious challenge to educational decision-making. As a result of the incomplete statistical data provided by the case studies, it is only possible for us to point out the following general trends.

The notable changes in the balance of proportions at the upper secondary level have veered towards an increase in transfers to and enrolments in general education courses, which is paralleled by a decline in vocational schooling. The vocational training courses which seem particularly badly affected are those providing only very narrow skill profiles, such as the Polish basic vocational school or short training courses elsewhere. The "winners" are not necessarily the secondary general schools with their increasingly academic focus even though they do, for instance, in the Czech Republic or in Hungary, register a certain growth. With respectively 18% and 26% of the pupil population they still remain comparatively exclusive. The same trend can be noted in Estonia although the original intake was much higher due to the fact that, in the one time Soviet Union, over half the pupils transferred to the secondary general schools. Albania is quite evidently a special case where the proportion of enrolments in general education and vocational training was practically reversed within a relatively short space of time: from 24:76 in 1985 to 66:34 in 1992 (with a general drop in the number of pupils at secondary level from 58% to 42% of the relevant age group). This is to be explained both by a streamlining of courses for agricultural occupations and by demand being oriented towards the radically altered conditions in the labour market.

According to the data available, the secondary technical schools were able to improve their position more than the general education schools. Even in countries where they were traditionally strong, such as in the Czech Republic, the Slovak Republic, Hungary or Poland, they were able to increase student numbers quite substantially (e.g. in the CR from 24% to 36.4% of all transfers from the basic school between 1989 and 1994). What would appear to make this path attractive is that it leads simultaneously to a general and a vocational qualification.

At the same time the quantative shifts among the vocational schools indicate that their relationship to one another should be reappraised from the point of view of functions and courses offered. Reference has already been made to the first signs of innovative approaches in this area. The new types of school, where general education and post-secondary special vocational training follow each other consecutively, should likewise be regarded in the context of a new structural diversity. The opportunities of the training sector developing beneath the tertiary stage on the post-secondary level rest both in the links between initial and continuing vocational training and in the flexible provision of courses for retraining, for which demand is growing in all the CEECS as a result of the upheavals in the employment market.

3.4. The role of enterprise-based training

In the school-based systems of VET in the CEECs, the state-run enterprises were allotted an important function as the location for the practical training of students. This training took place on the lines of an alternating or semi-dual model with the enterprises frequently acting as the direct sponsors of vocational schools and the trainees at times being regarded as apprentices rather than pupils. In this way the enterprises had a fully developed training infrastucture at their disposal together with the relevant experience. Following the

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transition to the market economy and to the privatisation or restructuring of the state enterprises, on-site workshops fell victim to the new cost-efficiency approach and many enterprises withdrew from vocational training. In order not to lose the valuable training resources, on-site training workshops in Hungary, for instance, have been retained as independent locations for learning with the aid of private and state financed sponsoring bodies. Other states are also attempting to find ways of saving the existing facilities for use in new training concepts by offering tax incentives, for example.

Where, and as far as, training within the newly created private sector has emerged, it is mainly focussed on retraining and adapting the adult workforce to the new requirements of modernised production and to new forms of business management. The disappearance of small private businesses in the socialist era had also resulted in the loss of older forms of on-site apprenticeship training. Poland is the only country where training in the traditional private trades and crafts businesses has been able to survive. As yet there is no evidence that state policy-making regarding reforms in VET intends to endow it with a more prominent systemic function. Other states, such as Lithuania, are considering adopting a dual system of apprenticeship training as a model for reforming VET. In Slovenia concrete plans for implementing a dual system, soon due to be sanctioned by law, have made considerable progress. It is to be set up as a key element of the new VET system alongside school-based forms in order to complement them. Experimental programmes are focussed primarily on the needs of small enterprises. Their success and the future prospects for this model depend, however, on gaining the cooperation of the enterprises.

4. Legislation, responsibilites and funding for VET

4.1. After their experiences with political arbitrariness under the former regimes, there was unanimous agreement among the reform-oriented forces in the CEECs that the establishment of democratic structures had to be based on the principle of rule of law. In order to overcome opposition by conservative forces, it was essential to provide legal safeguards for the projected reforms. For this reason the education sector in most states also saw a flurry of activity on the legislative front. The ensuing laws, which were often rapidly conceived and not backed up by experience, frequently appeared rather programmatic in character as they were codifying a projected state of affairs, not an existing one. Numerous problems in implementing the laws resulted from this and have already necessitated amendments in a number of states. Only a few states (CR, SR) confined themselves to a thorough overhaul of the legislative "legacy" from the communist era.

Considerable differences are manifested both in the areas covered by laws passed prior to 1995 and in the legislative approaches of the individual states. Some of the laws are framework laws encompassing the whole education system while others are geared to individual subsystems or levels of education. In either case, not all areas have been equally covered so that frequently old regulations exist alongside new ones. Contradictions likewise arise from the lack of coordination with legislation for other areas of the social system also affecting the education system.

This applies in particular to vocational education with its close-knit involvement with the restructuring of the economy and the labour market. Specific laws dealing with vocational training and its reform are still the exception (Hungary 1993, amended October 1995, Estonia 1995). In some countries (Lithuania, Slovenia) VET laws are awaiting enactment by parliament, but even these must be regarded as intermediary stages. In view of the indefinite and incomplete nature of legislation so far, its on-going development will be one of the priorities of the transformation processes.

4.2. When we examine the political and administrative responsibilities for education and, specifically, for VET, we are faced with the following situation: two of the main former protagonists in this field have either completely vanished, as in the case of the ruling political parties, which were given a "leading role" at all levels, or, as in the case of the various ministries once in charge of the state enterprises, have been drastically reduced in number. The latter were once not only a major source of funding for VET, but also the body generally responsible for the territorial distribution of training facilities in their specific domains, where they often paid scant attention to the more general requirements of the planning of training provision in the regions. Depending on the state of political reforms and the progress made in privatisation, they are now being replaced by a new cast of political actors, such as the autonomous business organisations (e.g. the chambers of commerce and trade associations) and the trade unions in their function of "social partners". However, these new actors obviously still need to find and define their roles and fields of responsibility in VET.

General responsibility for the provision and control of state VET lies mainly in the hands of the Education Ministries, but the way the powers are divided among state agencies provides scope for a great diversity of solutions. The dividing line runs vertically between central, regional and local levels and horizontally with regard to the powers of other central state agencies. The Ministries for Labour responsible for employment policies have a prominent role to play here, especially as far as continuing education and retraining measures for the unemployed are concerned. In some countries where VET seems to be regarded more as having a role to play in the employment system than as being part of the education system, it has been removed from the authority of the Education Ministry and delegated to the Ministry for Labour (Hungary) or to the Ministry of Economy (CR). In these cases some of the responsibilities, most particularly those applying to the general education components of VET, have remained in the hands of the Education Ministries.

This kind of construction inevitably gives rise to problems of coordination and tends to create tensions which are counterproductive to efficient poliy-making. Mechanisms for achieving a balance among diverse interests in VET are generally underdeveloped, with the National Council for Vocational Training in the case of Hungary being a notable exception. As an intermediary body it brings together representatives not only of the various state agencies but of the social partners (although with a bias towards the employers) as well, and its functions include the control of the system's efficiency and allocation of funds. Estonia has found an interesting solution for relieving the Education Ministry of some of its administrative tasks by establishing a National School Board probably designed on the lines of the Scandinavian pattern of administration.

As far as the authorities in the vertical dimension are concerned, one of the battle cries for overcoming the experience of hypertrophic central planning and the socialist "command" economy to be heard throughout Central and Eastern Europe was decentralisation. Devolution of powers to the regional and local levels was seen as a prerequisite for encouraging bottom-up reforms and was intended to ensure better attention was paid to concrete requirements at the local level. Even bearing in mind that, partially due to the sheer differences in size of the CEEC territories, decentralization involves a variety of interpretations, the extent of the actual distribution of powers still ranges from the retention of strict centralization, as in Romania, to a shifting of very essential functions in provision and control of VET to the municipal level in Hungary. As already mentioned, in some states autonomous business organizations and the social partners are actively encouraged to accept responsibilites in VET (in additon to Hungary e.g.in the CR and SR, Slovenia or Lithuania). One of the decisive problems of decentralization is how to bring the increase in flexibility and responsiveness into line with the enforcement and upholding of common national standards.

4.3. Funding is, without doubt, one of the most critical issues for VET throughout the CEECs. Although the actual situation varies between countries, expenditure has, on the whole, not kept up with soaring inflation, and budget cuts pose serious threats not only to plans for modernising the infrastructure, but also to the ability to meet running costs. Due to the lack of up-to-date and comparable data, it is only possible to outline some of the funding structures in very general terms. In most of the states VET is financed from a number of sources though the lion's share is provided by the state budget. The costs of the practical training and facilities, which used to be met by the enterprises, are now mainly covered by the state. For the greater part the state funds are allocated by the Education Ministries. In places, only basic provision is made by the state, the rest having to be raised by fees and income generated by the vocational schools themselves. A version practised in Lithuania entails the state financing initial training only, the continuation then being left to the "market". Due to financial constraints, expectations are increasingly directed towards the private sector and business as a whole contributing more to the costs of inital and continuing vocational training. Evidently the further trend is towards increased diversification of financial provision, involving, for instance, tax incentives directed at the enterprise. In Hungary, employers also contribute to funding vocational training by paying a certain proportion of their wage costs into the Vocational Training Fund.

5. Curricula, instruction and assessment

Curriculum reform in VET is a complex process, which cannot simply be interpreted as a mere reflection of on-going or expected changes in the labour market. It involves not only legitimate economic interests expressed in the skill demands of the employment system, but also educational goals of a more general nature along with the concerns of young people to develop their personality and safeguard their own future opportunities. The need to balance the multiple and often conflicting demands made on VET means the decision-makers are faced with difficult options, made even more complicated by the conditions arising from the system transformation in the CEECs. Nonetheless, the curricula's function of mediating between the labour market and the VET institutions results in transition proceses having a far-reaching effect on the structures and contents of the curricula.

On the issue of curricula structures in the former VET systems of the CEECs, the country reports coincide in a number of general findings, indicating where the curricula are inadequate for providing the qualifications appropriate for a modern market economy:

- the narrow specialization of the curricula for vocational instruction and of qualification profiles based on a large number of occupations reflecting the job structures of the various branches of industry,

- the centralized and prescriptive character of the curricula, which leaves little scope for innovations or for taking account of local conditions,

- the contents with their focus on the knowledge to be acquired, and the highly formalised and didactic style of teaching,

- the lack of coordination between the general and the vocational components of the curricula, on the one hand, and between the theoretical and the practical aspects of vocational instruction, on the other.

These curricula reflect the structures of production and the technological standard of socialist enterprises whilst also representing a more general and traditionally embedded "culture" of organizing school instruction. At the same time they provide the launching pad for the envisaged reform processes, processes for which the prerequisites have in some countries yet to be created in the shape of new institutional arrangements, methodologies and research support. Thus, for a transitional period these old curricula will continue to determine training courses, albeit in a modified form. Cooperative support of the curriculum reform on the part of western partners would require more detailed information on these present curricula, the structuring of the contents and any modifications already embarked on than is available in the country reports.

According to the reports, the fact that changes in the employment systems of the CEECs not only result in substantial changes to existing job structures, but also necessitate entirely new qualifications geared to the market economy is taken as the starting point for restructuring curricula for VET in all the CEECs. As a reaction of VET to changes in the labour market, the following trends can be observed throughout the CEECs:

- a number of new occupations and specialities have emerged in new domains of economic activity, such as business, commerce, banking etc.,

- there is a move towards despecialization of occupational profiles and a broadening of skill requirements. This includes the revision of official, centrally approved lists and classifications of training occupations and is aimed at reducing the number of specialities,

- the dismantling of overspecialization corresponds to an obvious trend to strengthen the general education component and this in turn touches on the relations laid down in the curricula between general education subjects, instruction in the theoretical foundations of individual occupations and practical skill training.

The decline in the number of on-site training places, mentioned above, also results in the expansion of theoretical components of training as the school workshops are unable to compensate for this loss on their own. When this trend is viewed in conjunction with the uncertain prospects of the employment situation, it is possible to grasp why, in some countries at least, the transfer of vocational specialization to a later phase in training has been allocated a prominent place on the reform agenda. Nonetheless, it still remains necessary to tackle the task of improving the coordination of the general education components with the vocational contents in the curriculum on both the theoretical and the practical levels. In view of the fact that the balance of general contents and vocationally oriented contents has shifted in favour of the former, it will likewise be necessary to study critically the effect this has on the social acceptance of those "simple" courses of vocational training not leading to a certificate of secondary education.

The release from the constraints of a planned economy together with the need for the quality of VET to become internationally competitive in the new conditions of the market economy means the CEECs face a fundamental choice:

- either to implement a radical revision and modernization of the structures and contents of the curricula in order to adapt training standards to the new conditions - a step which would have to be based on the historically acquired "logic" of the traditional system,

- or to aim at a substantial systemic change on the lines of (West)European models.

A number of countries are indeed considering setting off in a completely new direction, with the aid of foreign organizations and consultants. However, as far as can be seen, actual developments are tending towards reforming and improving the efficiency of existing systems. For curriculum development this means, over and beyond the approaches already described, applying flexibilization strategies which avail themselves of international practices and reform trends. It will entail relaxing the structure of curricula geared to strictly defined occupational profiles by adopting modular elements; the decentralizing of curricular decison-making will involve the "providers" and "receivers" of qualifications to a greater extent; and a particular emphasis will be laid on standards and assessment.

Experiences made with decentralization so far indicate that curriculum development carried out on a local basis or in the individual school requires the expert's guidance so that relevant signals from the labour market can be registered and made appropriate use of. It has also been recognized that central guidelines and framework regulations are required for local curriculum development so that qualifications remain comparable and achieve recognition at national level.

Decentralization also provided some countries with an outlet for the first wave of bottled up reform demands. In the meantime it is a question of creating new mechanisms in curriculum development that are able to steer the continuing revision process efficiently. The situation concerning the institutional infrastructure and the necessary experience and skills varies from country to country.

This also applies to such tasks as monitoring the outcomes of pilot projects, evaluating and disseminating examples of "good practice" and, most particularly, to developing and implementing new approaches to assessment and certification. Comparability of national standards of VET and international recognition of qualifications and certificates is an explict aim of educational policy-making in the CEECs. While, so far, the emphasis has been on "input" to the training process as laid down in detail in the curricula and programmes for training, attempts are now being made to switch the focus to the outcomes of the training process and to adopting a competency model as the basis for determining qualification standards. To what extent the preconditions for a comprehensive implementation of such new approaches - including mental attitudes and public acceptance - actually prevail can only be revealed in the public debates in the individual countries. Partners in international cooperation must be aware of these conditions and take them into account.

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6. Teaching staff in VET

Change in the organization and curricula of VET as projected or embarked on in the CEECs has little chance of success unless it is actively supported by teaching staff. System transformation as experienced by teachers has, on the one hand, given them hitherto unknown scope for engaging in innovative practice; on the other hand, they see their social and occupational status threatened by the continuing decline of their salaries and the inadequate funding of the education sector. For some countries, a "brain-drain" from teaching and training into other jobs has been reported, while others seem to find few problems in recruiting new teachers for vocational schools.

The fact that in some countries VET teaching staff do not appear highly motivated for change is also a reflection of their fear that their present qualifications do not equip them adequately to cope with the demands of reform. For teachers to be put in a position to carry out their new role as agents of change, teacher training - in-service as well as initial training - is of crucial importance. Even when teachers are not actively involved in curriculum development, they must be given the necessary assistance for adopting new teaching strategies - student-centred approaches, project work, development of "key" skills - and for dealing with the new assessment procedures.

In the CEEC systems of VET there are four different teacher categories:

- teachers of general subjects, who mostly hold higher education qualifications,
- teachers of theoretical subjects in the vocational sphere, who have, to a large extent, also taken a higher education course of study although the standard of pedagogical qualifications would appear to vary greatly from country to country,
- instructors for practical workshop training within vocational schools, who sometimes have a technician qualification, sometimes are skilled workers or have a masters certificate. A course in higher education is the exception here and generally the instructors have no special educational training,
- instructors for in-plant training, who are mostly recruited from the ranks of skilled workers.

While the first two categories of teaching staff may have acquired adequate formal qualifications through higher education, there is so far little evidence of the extent to which courses of higher education are an appropriate preparation for the specific demands of reform. Special courses in vocational teacher training are, as yet, only provided by a number of Hungarian universities.

As intitial teacher training will only affect reform processes in the longer term, in-service training acquires immediate significance. The extent of availability and the forms of organization differ substantially from country to country. Generally these tasks are the responsibility of special institutes, some of which were reorganized in the early 1990s. Romania has embarked on the establishment of teacher resource centres. In view of the acknowledged multiplicatory function of initial and in-service teacher training institutions for innovative practice, expansion in this field needs to be encouraged by international cooperation.

7. Educational research and information

It is not necessary here to focus particularly on the multiple tasks of educational research in supporting reform policies, ranging from educational planning to curriculum development and the revision of methods for teaching and training processes. The restructuring of so many areas of the education system, as necessitated by the system transformation, has also substantially extended the remit of educational research. The monitoring of reform processes and information feed-back on new requirements, are just two issues indicating the direction for expansion, which will also require new research approaches and skills. This applies particularly to VET at the interface of education policy-making and developments in the employment system. The present research potential exposes obvious deficits in areas such as the labour market and occupational structures analysis.

The country reports, though providing an overall picture, do not permit of any detailed or reliable commentary on the available research potential and research organization, not even for the narrower field of research in vocational education. A special up-to-date survey of this field would seem desirable, not only for the sake of east-west cooperation, but also in order to encourage research cooperation among the CEECs. The extension of such cooperation appears appropiate as resource availability varies from country to country and an exchange of experiences and results might compensate for some of the remaining deficits.

In some countries the capacity of educational research has been drastically reduced. Institutes have been closed, as particularly in Poland, or reorganised. Researchers have come into the line of fire for their ideological functions in the previous regime, and there has also been some enforced staff turnover. Generally education research institutes are fairly closely associated with the Education Ministries and work directly for them so that the focus is on applied research. A developed educational support structure, which also includes universities, can be found in the CR and Hungary and both countries have special vocational training research institutes, as does the SR. All in all, the potential of higher education institutions to provide research support for educational reforms has not yet been properly tapped.

8. Concluding remarks

The 11 country studies show beyond a doubt that it is not possible to find any solutions, let alone "simple" ones, which would apply in general to the complex problems of VET in the countries in transition. It is an inevitable consequence of the process of transition that the VET systems have undergone fundamental changes, with many of the characteristics of the old system fading away and new features geared to the conditions of a modern market economy emerging, albeit gradually and reluctantly. In their conclusions, the individual country reports have pointed out a large number of specific approaches and solutions which cannot be drawn together in any kind of a systematic summary. For each of the countries concerned, however, they should be evaluated carefully and critically by national policy-makers and by those engaged in international cooperation and transformation programmes for VET.

The country reports converge in a number of fundamental findings:

- Even in relation to individual VET systems there are no definite, clear-cut models to be followed and there are no unambiguous answers to be found for the problems and challenges of the transitions process.

- Although the CEECs seek guidance and support in Western countries this must not result in an attempt to superimpose outside solutions and approaches which are rooted in different historical and cultural contexts; this does not mean the rejection of international development trends, but rather that the adoption of foreign experiences should be regarded as a cooperative creative learning process on the part of all concerned. When foreign involvement aims at helping countries to help themselves, it is the national actors themselves who must reconcile the new approaches from the West with the logic of their own education systems.

- In some countries there are demands for a grand design for a comprehensive reform of VET. However, most experts obviously give preference to a step by step transformation policy, which may be regarded as more realistic since the developments of the economy and the labour market cannot be exactly predicted and it is on these developments that the future shape of VET depends and to which it must respond.

- A policy of more gradual change would also take the time factor into account and enable those affected by change to adjust to new conditions. However, gradualism runs the risk of loosing sight of the goals of reform and wasting time and energy on secondary issues.

One means of encouraging reform processes without upsetting the system is the establishment of pilot programmes and projects, a course taken in the CEECs for a number of years. Above all, these provide an opportunity to initiate innovations with foreign support, to experiment with new approaches and, where these are successful, to promote acceptance for them. Such pilot schemes contribute to a greater variability of VET systems and promote educational policies focussing on divergence and openness of approaches and solutions in contrast to the socialist systems' emphasis on the principle of uniformity.

On the other hand, it is also essential to be mindful of the problems which might arise from the competitive stance of western models and development strategies in the individual CEECs. In this sense, it is certainly too narrow an interpretation of "good practice" when the country reports apply this notion almost exclusively to reform projects undertaken with foreign cooperation partners. An evaluation of such projects after the first few years of the inital phase of cooperation with regard to their impact on the system transformation of VET in the individual countries did not belong to the scope of the reports and this remains a substantial task for the future. At the same time any attempt to identify examples of "good pratice" should systematically highlight the "indigenous" development of grass roots reform initiatives.

A number of the country reports emphasize the significance of up-to-date information and feedback forming the basis for policy-making and efficient international cooperation. The reports as such and their results show there are still large deficits in this field, which urgently need to be addressed if synergetic effects are to be achieved by means of cooperation. For the acquisition of reliable and comprehensive data bases it is necessary to encourage the expansion and increase in efficiency of independent educational research and support facilities. As indicated above, university research institutions have a significant role to play here.

A new and comprehensive information basis is particularly necessary for establishing the new communication structures between education and the labour market called for in most reports. Substantial information deficits are to be found for the following problems (to mention only a few examples of research priorities)

- statistical data on the flows of students at the various levels of the education system; the compilation of a statistical handbook to cover the education system or VET (including adult and continuing education) in the various countries would certainly be a useful tool,

- structures and contents of present curricula in VET, the forms of assessment, certification and the related entitlements as a starting point for reform and the question of international recognition (such investigations have been carried out for years in the EU),

- job aspiration and career planning and the ensuing choice of educational courses among young people,

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- the acceptance of new courses of vocational training and new qualifications and certificates, not only among young people and their parents, but also among employers and the general public,

- the results of reform programmes, the evaluation of which has already been mentioned.

A further task to follow this is the dissemination of information, research outcomes and "good practice". This has been identified as a deficit area in various reports. One of the issues this includes is the provision of the relevant media (electronic and print), which can achieve their multiplicatory effect with relatively little financial effort - forms of cooperation among the countries can be envisaged here, too. In addition, questions of staff development and in-service training require greater attention and here the international exchange of teaching staff, specialists and researchers likewise has a multiplicatory role to play. One last point not explicitly stated but made implicitly clear by studying the country reports is the importance of the specialist terminology and its translation into other languages in promoting correct mutual perceptions.

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